

Washougal River Watershed

Description of the watershed

The headwaters of the Washougal River are in Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Skamania County. The river flows westward into Clark County and ultimately to the Columbia River at Camas. Twelve miles of its 33-mile length are in Clark County. Of the entire 212-square-mile Washougal River drainage area, 50 square miles are within Clark County. The two major tributaries, Little Washougal River and Cougar Creek, are located entirely within Clark County.

The Washougal River watershed is largely forested, including the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and other public and private forestlands in the Cascade Mountains and foothills. Rural residential development and smaller farmsteads cover much of the lower watershed in Clark County. The last four miles of the Washougal River flow through the cities of Washougal and Camas.

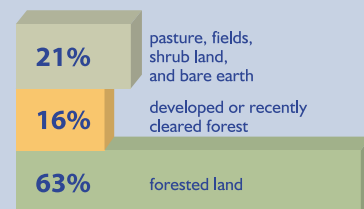
The Washougal River and its tributaries are an important local and regional resource for boating, fishing, and swimming. Public access points include areas above Hughes Road and at developed and undeveloped parks in Camas and Washougal.

The city of Camas draws part of its drinking water from two smaller tributaries, Jones and

Boulder creeks. These are the only creeks in Clark County used as municipal drinking water sources.

The Washougal River provides habitat for wildlife and fish, including chinook, chum, winter and summer steelhead, coho, and coastal cutthroat trout. The main stem of the Washougal River is free flowing with no manmade obstructions or dams. Dugan Falls, 21 miles upstream from the river mouth, blocks salmon and most steelhead passage. Much of the Little Washougal River is accessible to salmon and steelhead. While the Washougal River has good to excellent stream health, salmon habitat is somewhat limited by a lack of gravel spawning beds and woody debris in the main channel. This is caused by decades of logging and large fires during the early 1900s.

Land uses in the Washougal River Watershed



Using a summer 2000 satellite image, the University of Washington determined that the Clark County portion of the Washougal River watershed is nearly two thirds forestland.

How healthy are the Washougal River watershed streams?

Stream health information generally agrees with what would be expected by looking at the range of land uses – from forest to highly developed. The observed stream health ranges from excellent to poor. The main stem has an overall rating of excellent to good based on water chemistry and bacteria. The rating would have been excellent for the entire main stem except for high levels of harmful bacteria one summer. The Little Washougal River's headwaters in Jones Creek are rated excellent. Near the Little Washougal's confluence with the Washougal River, a stream bed insect sample in 2002 indicated poor health.

Despite its size and significance as a fisheries resource, the Washougal River is less studied than many streams in Clark County. The county has monitored the Little Washougal River and the state gathered water quality data on the main stem during

the early 1990s. The state also periodically monitors Washougal River water quality just upstream of the boundary between Clark and Skamania counties. Within Clark County, monitoring results are available for approximately 16 percent of the watershed's stream miles that flow year round, including one Jones Creek site.

While existing water quality data isn't sufficient to identify specific problems and sources, there are concerns about temperature and bacteria in these streams, as well as increased channel erosion caused by forest clearing, road building, and residential development, especially in the lower part of the watershed.

The following bar charts show the overall health ratings from four perspectives. Approximately 84 percent of the streams are not assessed using field testing.

Overall health



Stream life health based on health of streambed creatures



Health for recreational use based on presence of harmful bacteria



General water quality based on temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen

